

STRATEGIC VISION & ROADMAP FOR MISSOURI'S CHILDHOOD SYSTEM

Importance of a Strong, Unified Childhood System

A strong childhood system is essential to supporting working families, ensuring safe environments and healthy child development, and advancing a prosperous economy.

Promoting School Readiness and Child Well-Being: The window from birth to age five is critical in a child's development, with 90% of brain development occurring during this time.¹ High-quality early childhood services not only lead to gains in early reading and math, but longitudinal studies also illustrate reduced grade retention, reduced placement in special education, increased likelihood of attending a four-year university, and better earnings.² Benefits of early childhood services extend beyond education, with participating children experiencing reduced chances of criminal activity, depression, teenage pregnancy, and welfare participation.³ Afterschool programming also enhances these gains later in childhood and results in additional positive outcomes such as decreased behavior referrals and increased school attendance.⁴

Strengthening the Economy: Additionally, increased access to accessible and high-quality early and extended learning experiences for children empowers caregivers, who are mostly women, to remain in or re-enter the workforce, advance skills, and earn income, which boosts the economy as a whole.⁵ Research shows 61% of working parents in Missouri reported missing work due to child care challenges, and when women have access to child care, they earn more than \$94,000 of additional income over the course of their careers.^{6,7} These benefits also extend to society as a whole with research demonstrating that each dollar spent on high-quality birth to five programs can have a 13% return on investment, and thus reduce later government spending.⁸

Note: This strategic plan focuses on early childhood initiatives in the Office of Childhood (OOC); however, OOC administers both early and extended learning programs. OOC is committed to providing and improving afterschool programming for children in Missouri as investments in afterschool programming build on the initial investments made in early childhood. Participating in afterschool programs results in positive outcomes such as decreased behavior referrals and increased school attendance. More information about afterschool programming can be found on [EarlyConnections](#).

Missouri's Progress to Date

Missouri has an opportunity to better serve children and families through high-quality early childhood programs and services by building on the incremental successes of the system over the years. Missouri has offered children and families access to early childhood programs for decades, and recent major successes led to the state recently unifying early childhood programs under one office:

- **2014:** Pre-K funding added to K-12 education funding formula
- **2015:** A statewide early childhood advocacy campaign raised \$13 million in a Raise Your Hands for Kids ballot initiative
- **2016:** Quality Assurance Report (QAR) pilot established
- **2018:** \$42 million for Pre-K funding added to K-12 education funding formula; QAR pilot sunset extended
- **2019:** Missouri received initial \$6.5M Preschool Development Grant (PDG) B-5 and became one of only 23 states to be awarded PDG B-5 renewal for an additional \$33M for three years; Legislation approved \$6M in new funding for home visiting programs; Missouri became one of six states awarded the National Governors Association Prenatal to 3 grant
- **2020:** Missouri became one of 10 states selected as Zero to Three grantee; DESE restructured early childhood programs into Office of Early Learning; Missouri appropriated over \$66 million in CARES Act COVID-19 relief funds for child care providers

¹ <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/inbrief-science-of-ecd/>

² https://www.policymattersohio.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/pre-kpinch_Nov2008_report.pdf

³ <https://evidencebasedprograms.org/programs/abecedarian-project/>

⁴ <https://earlyconnections.mo.gov/media/pdf/afterschool-programs>

⁵ <https://www.ffyf.org/why-it-matters/support-working-families/>

⁶ <https://nclc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/A-Lifetimes-Worth-of-Benefits-Compliant.pdf>

⁷ <https://mochamber.com/news-archive/new-research-shows-missouri-loses-1-35-billion-in-annual-economic-opportunity-due-to-childcare-gaps/>

⁸ <https://heckmanequation.org/www/assets/2017/01/F Heckman CBAOnePager 120516.pdf>

- **2021:** Governor Parson established OOC through executive order, resulting in the consolidation of early childhood governance for Missouri; Multiple childhood programs transitioned into OOC; The Hunt Institute conducted activities to improve stakeholder engagement; Missouri appropriated over \$185 million in CRRSA COVID-19 relief funds for child care
- **2022:** Governor Parson established new Early Childhood State Advisory Council through executive order, resulting in the consolidation of advisory structures; Missouri appropriated nearly \$722 million in ARPA COVID relief funds and \$15 million for rate increases to the First Steps early intervention and Parents as Teachers Parent Education program

OOC is committed to continuing to work with stakeholders to realize its vision.

Missouri's Childhood Vision: All children are safe, healthy, and successful learners.

- **All children, and especially children from vulnerable communities,** have access to affordable and high-quality early care and education that prepares them for success in school and in life.
- **Working families** have the resources and supports to easily navigate Missouri's childhood system and choose a high-quality care and education option that supports their child's development.
- **Families with children receiving support at home** understand how to support their child's development through family engagement strategies and readily available resources.
- **Childhood professionals** are focused on providing a high-quality experience for children, regardless of the setting, and have access to the tools (e.g., curriculum, assessment and screening tools, etc.) and necessary training/professional development to support child learning and development.
- **State systems and processes** are modernized to focus on the experience of families/providers and yield data to drive policy and decision-making.

Challenges and Opportunities for Missouri's Early Childhood System

Missouri, like many other states, faces critical challenges in achieving the vision that all Missouri children are safe, healthy, and successful learners.

Access: Too few families have access to early childhood programs and services, as a result of both insufficient early childhood options and insufficient funding, which results in consequences to children's health, safety, and well-being, as well as preventing many Missouri caregivers from participating in the workforce.

Quality: Currently, Missouri does not have a clear definition of quality for early childhood programs and services. Additionally, there are not enough supports for professionals to improve their quality or for families to make informed decisions for their children.

Local coordination: Across the state, local leaders are not supported to coordinate information and resources for early childhood professionals and families in the communities where they live and work.

Data-driven solutions: There is a lack of real-time and overall data to empower decision makers to find innovative solutions to increase access and scale high-quality services.

Missouri's Big Goals

To achieve this vision and address the system's greatest challenges, OOC will focus on these four Big Goals in service of Missouri's ultimate goal for all children in the state to have access to high-quality experiences prior to kindergarten that will prepare them for success in school and in life:

Big Goals

Expand Access to High-Quality Programs and Services

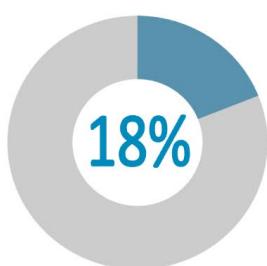
Missouri will expand access to high-quality early childhood options for families by identifying current gaps and maximizing existing and new resources.

Improve the Quality of Programs and Services	Missouri will define a vision of quality for the state and provide aligned supports and incentives for professionals in order to drive continuous improvement in the quality of early childhood programs and services.
Strengthen Community Leadership	Missouri will identify, support, and empower local leaders in every part of the state to develop and implement strong community plans aimed at ensuring all families with young children can access high-quality programs, services, and resources in their communities.
Modernize Systems and Improve Operations	Missouri will identify and implement critical shifts in OOC operations to improve the experience of families and early childhood professionals and to yield important data to inform policy and decision-making.

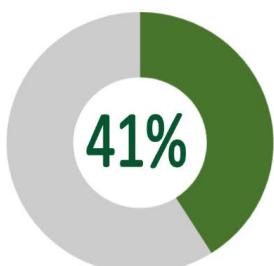
Missouri Landscape

Missouri's landscape consists of approximately 450,000 children birth through age five, according to 2019 Census data.^{9,10,11,12,13}

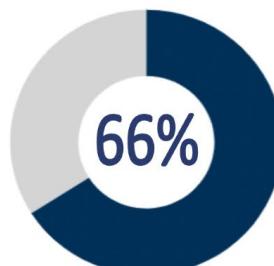
	Infants	One-year-olds	Two-year-olds	Three-year-olds	Four-year-olds	Five-year-olds
Estimated children	71,649	72,748	73,546	74,251	75,384	79,065



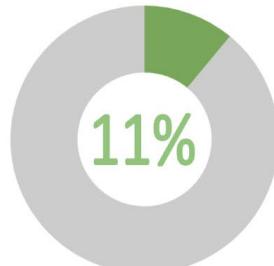
of MO children are living in poverty
(100% Federal Poverty Level)⁹



of MO children are economically disadvantaged
(200% Federal Poverty Level)¹⁰



of MO children have all parents in the household working¹¹



of MO children have a special health care need¹²

As evidenced by the data, the need for early childhood services in Missouri is vast. Meeting the needs of these children and families in the state necessitates innovative approaches and partnerships that extend beyond OOC. Many organizations, both public and private, around the state already engage in and support early childhood efforts, and OOC seeks to partner with these organizations to meet the need for early childhood services (e.g., Head Start, school districts, etc.). To achieve the goals set forth in this plan, OOC will utilize all available resources (i.e., federal, state, and philanthropic) to drive towards a unified vision for children birth to five in Missouri.

⁹ Missouri Census Data Center Population Estimates <https://mc当地.missouri.edu/applications/population/by-age/>

¹⁰ 2019 Census Data- Poverty <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=Poverty&g=0400000US29&tid=ACSDT1Y2019.B17024>

¹¹ 2019 Census Data- 200% FPL: <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=Poverty&g=0400000US29&tid=ACSDT1Y2019.B17024>

¹² 2019 Census data- Parents Working: <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?tid=ACSDT1Y2019.B23008>

¹³ National resource 2019-20 Center from Child and Adolescent Health(Children with Special health care need)
<https://www.childhealthdata.org/browse/survey/results?q=8577&r=1&r2=27&g=936>

Strategic Plan Overview

This strategic plan outlines OOC's plan for the next three years as it seeks to achieve Missouri's vision for early childhood. It is organized around OOC's four Big Goals; embedded within each goal are objectives and strategies. Objectives represent OOC's major focus areas within each Big Goal, and the strategies included within each objective articulate OOC's approach to achieving these aims. To ensure that progress towards these goals is measurable, this plan also includes 2023 action items which OOC plans to accomplish in the next year and quantitative targets (Appendix I).

Additional context is included in each section to provide background and an overview of the current state, as measured by available data in fall 2022. While OOC's goals are ambitious and will lead to positive impacts on children and families across the state, fully realizing the state's vision for early childhood will require time, and likely additional investments in early childhood at all levels of the system (i.e., local, state, federal).

Big Goal 1: Expand Access to High-Quality Childhood Programs and Services

Missouri will expand access to high-quality early childhood options for families by identifying current gaps and maximizing existing and new resources.

Background

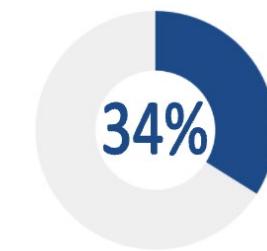
For the purposes of this plan, access is defined as the number of children or families participating in a publicly-funded early childhood program or service. Before discussing how to expand access, it is helpful to understand existing gaps in access and the systemic causes that perpetuate these gaps.

While OOC is working to build a system in which all children in the state are able to access high-quality early childhood options, research shows that children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to have these options and more likely to enter kindergarten behind their more affluent peers.¹⁴ To achieve its vision that all children are healthy, safe, and successful learners who are prepared for school, OOC particularly seeks to expand access to high-quality early childhood programs and services to children from economically disadvantaged households, who are at higher risk of entering kindergarten behind.

Current State

Of the 450,000 children birth to five in Missouri, roughly 185,000¹⁵ (41%) are living in households at or below 200% of Federal Poverty Level (FPL) (i.e., considered economically disadvantaged), and would benefit from publicly-funded early childhood services to minimize the risk of them falling behind their more affluent peers prior to kindergarten entry. To meet the needs of this population, OOC offers a range of early care and education services targeted at serving economically disadvantaged families. It is important to note OOC partners also offer programs aimed at serving economically disadvantaged families (e.g., Early Head Start, Head Start).

Currently, only one in three economically disadvantaged children birth to age five access Missouri's publicly-funded early care and education programs that



of economically disadvantaged children birth to five are currently served

¹⁴ https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/0319_school_disadvantage_isaacs.pdf

¹⁵ <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=Poverty&g=0400000US29&tid=ACSDT1Y2019.B17024>

target low-income families through OOC and its partners; this percentage is even lower for infants and toddlers.¹⁶ Even when families are eligible, there are a variety of reasons they may not be accessing these programs. Many families face economic, geographic, or systemic barriers to access, including lack of awareness, insufficient funding, transportation challenges, language barriers, complex technology systems, lack of options in the community, and nontraditional hours not being offered by providers. In some cases, because all of OOC's programs and services are voluntary, families who are eligible for a service may simply choose not to utilize it.

Closing Missouri's gaps in access will require strategic coordination and partnership across all of the publicly-funded early childhood programs in the state both within and outside of OOC. For that reason, OOC is focused on building and expanding access to a strong, unified and coordinated mixed delivery system, in which publicly-funded services are offered in both public (i.e., local education agencies or LEAs) and private (i.e., child care centers, family child care homes, and church-based child care programs that accept public funds to serve children) settings. A mixed delivery approach to early childhood is necessary to meet the diverse needs of families and providers across all areas of the state. This includes expanding access to preschool and child care, as well as important childhood services, including parent education, home visiting, early intervention, early childhood special education services, and afterschool programming. Specific program-level data are available in appendix I.

Objectives, Strategies, and Action Items

Objective 1: Identify gaps in access. Analyze current data and collect additional data as needed, related to current need, demand, capacity, and utilization of services, particularly as it relates to vulnerable populations and communities.¹⁷

Strategies:

- Develop a way to measure access for each program and across programs, and determine additional data to collect, as needed
- Publish access data periodically that depict statewide and program-specific gaps in access
- Develop a process for using an unduplicated child count that provides more accurate and timely data on gaps in access, disaggregated by key child demographics (e.g., race, age, geography)

2023 Action Items:

- Define how access will be measured for each program
- Launch Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS) and identify unduplicated child count for programs participating in ECIDS
- Implement a public-facing dashboard to inform the general public of program utilization data

Objective 2: Increase awareness and coordination to ensure all available spots or services are utilized. Ensure that all families in the state, particularly those who are economically disadvantaged, are supported to learn about, apply for, and enroll in programs and services they are eligible for or they need.

Strategies

- Make available statewide resources for families to easily access information about programs, particularly in places where children and families already connect (e.g., libraries, physician offices, laundromats, community centers)
- Conduct statewide and targeted childhood information campaigns, with a particular focus on underutilized programs and services
- Support communities to use a locally coordinated process for enrollment, intake, and referrals that will better support all families, regardless of background or location, to access programs and services and ensure all available spots and services in a community are utilized

¹⁶ FY 21 program data from early care and education (ECE) programs indicated that 62,895 children were served across ECE programs. Some children may be served in multiple programs, thus this count may contain some duplicates.

¹⁷ See appendix II for more information.

2023 Action Items:

- Conduct a targeted statewide media campaign to increase awareness of programs
- Collaborate with community leaders to increase awareness of childhood programs in communities
- Recruit families to participate in advisory councils and leadership activities at the state and local levels
- Identify current local efforts to coordinate enrollment, intake, and referral processes
- Provide access to a public database of childhood resources and services at the state and local levels

Objective 3: Increase capacity and availability of programs and services. Maximize the number of children and families served in all settings and create new capacity as identified by the gap analysis.

Strategies:

- Maximize existing funding to strengthen childhood programs to ensure that providers (i.e., child care, home visiting) can operate financially stable programs and grow capacity over time
- Support providers and programs to recruit, retain, and train members of the childhood workforce through initiatives:
 - Implement a marketing campaign for childhood professionals
 - Adapt four-year college programs to align with early childhood pathways
 - Develop a statewide Child Development Associate (CDA) program for high school students
- Expand the childhood workforce by offering financial support and incentives to recruit and retain professionals
- Use data to inform statewide and local efforts to maximize resources and investments in programs

2023 Action Items:

- Conduct a study that researches alternatives to the current subsidy structure
- Streamline regulations and program requirements for public preschool funding, making it easier for LEAs to utilize all available preschool funding to serve the maximum number of children
- Offer financial incentives (i.e., retention grants) to child care and home visiting programs

Big Goal 2: Improve the Quality of Childhood Programs and Services

Missouri will define a vision of quality for the state and provide aligned supports and incentives for professionals in order to drive continuous improvement in the quality of early childhood programs and services.

Background

Research is clear that the quality of experiences that children have with adults and their peers, both in the home and in care and education settings, can significantly improve child outcomes.^{18,19} The depth and frequency of positive, reciprocal interactions that children have with the adults in their lives can be a powerful predictor of children's success in school and later in life.²⁰ Further, high-quality services, such as home visiting, early intervention, or parent education programs, provide families with critical resources to support them to provide safe, supportive, and developmental environments for their children.²¹

To achieve its vision that all children are safe, healthy, and successful learners, Missouri is committed to ensuring that children receive high-quality care, education, and services, across the continuum of early childhood programs offered throughout the state, and that families have the information they need to make informed decisions about the quality of programs for their children.

¹⁸ <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/144-the-research-case-for-home-visiting>

¹⁹ <https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/aer.103.6.2052>

²⁰ http://developingchild.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Policy_Framework.pdf

²¹ http://www.pewtrusts.org/~media/legacy/uploadedfiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/reports/home_visiting/HomeVisitingAugust2011Reportpdf

Current State

Currently, Missouri is participating in a quality assurance pilot program for early learning programs, but does not have a clear, statewide definition of what high-quality early childhood experiences look like for children and families or how quality is measured across programs or settings. Programs operate with their own standards to ensure quality or model fidelity, and there is no north star for quality in the state. As a result, no one – parents, providers, or state decision makers – has visibility into the quality of experience children and families are having across care and education settings, nor other programs such as home visiting or early intervention. In 2016, the state took steps to better define and support quality in its early care and education programs through the establishment of a Quality Assurance Report (QAR). The QAR was created to develop a continuous quality improvement process for early learning programs and to provide families with information about the quality of these programs.

To date, six cohorts of early childhood providers have participated in QAR, and data illustrates that participation in a quality assurance system has led to an improvement in the quality of the programs over time.²² OOC is currently in the process of compiling and analyzing data from pilots to select and refine a quality framework and improvement system. While a specific tool has not been selected to scale at this time, the state is looking at national best practices on early childhood quality frameworks and improvement systems, many of which center around teacher-child interactions, which are highly predictive of child outcomes.

In addition to enhancing the quality of care and education environments through the QAR process, OOC is committed to improving the quality of its early childhood services (i.e., home visiting, early intervention, parent education) to ensure alignment in quality experiences in all types of settings.

Objectives, Strategies, and Action Items

Objective 1: Clearly define and communicate a common definition of quality. Develop a clear definition of the high-quality experiences children and their families should have regardless of the program or the setting in which they are served.

Strategies:

- With feedback from stakeholders, finalize and publish a definition of quality childhood programming
- Align all QAR cohorts to a clear, simple framework that uses quality indicators to measure the quality of experience children have in care and education settings, across the state, regardless of program or funding source
- Establish a common definition of quality for home visiting services, regardless of model
- Once established, communicate the definition of quality to all stakeholders, particularly families and professionals

2023 Action Items:

- Engage stakeholders to finalize OOC's definition of quality
- Finalize a QAR framework for measuring the quality of early care and education settings
- Develop a draft framework for measuring the quality of home visiting

Objective 2: Measure childhood programs based on the definition of quality. Once developed, use indicators of quality to represent the quality of childhood programs and services.

Strategies

- Increase the number of early learning programs participating in QAR
- Publish quality indicators for QAR in an easily understood format so that families can make informed decisions and select programs that match their needs
- Implement the definition for quality home visiting services

²² <https://dese.mo.gov/media/pdf/qar-final-report-2021-pilot-program-cohorts-1-5>

- Use data to celebrate successes, elevate best practices, target additional supports for improvement, and inform future policymaking

2023 Action Items:

- Recruit additional early learning providers to participate in QAR
- Research and design a dashboard to display QAR results and other quality indicators

Objective 3: Support programs and services to improve in quality by offering resources, supports, and training aligned with the definition of quality. Provide programs and services with the necessary resources for improvement and ensure that all quality improvement initiatives (e.g., professional preparation, professional development, T.E.A.C.H./CDA scholarships, apprenticeships) are aligned and driving towards the same vision for quality.

Strategies:

- Support early learning programs participating in QAR to practice continuous quality improvement using the results of onsite assessments by offering materials, information, and other resources
- Support home visiting providers to implement the definition of quality by providing resources and trainings
- Increase quality supports for child care providers by implementing regional networks of early care and education quality specialists statewide that offer targeted coaching, trainings, support, and technical assistance to providers in their region
- Strengthen the skills and competencies of the childhood workforce by increasing quality supports through initiatives:
 - Launch a professional development system that includes access to no-cost required trainings and low-cost, on-demand trainings
 - Develop a list of preferred CDA vendors to assure quality of training
 - Provide training to professionals on topics such as trauma-informed care and developmental screening

2023 Action Items:

- Launch regional specialist networks statewide
- Launch new professional development system with a registry, training, and learning management system
- Update content in existing training courses before including them in the new professional development system

Big Goal 3: Strengthen Community Leadership

Missouri will identify, support, and empower local leaders in every part of the state to develop and implement strong community plans aimed at ensuring all families with young children can access high-quality programs, services, and resources in their communities.

Background

Missouri cannot successfully provide access to high-quality early childhood programs and services across the state from Jefferson City alone. The diversity of the state requires a state-local partnership in which early childhood initiatives, aligned to a state level vision, can be tailored to the needs and challenges of a community. In addition to providing community context to the state, local leaders are also essential to ensuring that families are supported with the information and resources necessary to access services for which they are eligible.

Current State

Nationwide, there is not a consistent model for the local coordination of early childhood services.^{23,24} Because of this lack of coordination, there is often not an entity in most communities that has a clear picture of the entire early childhood landscape. In many states, including Missouri, this often results in families struggling to navigate early

²³ <https://www.capita.org/capita-ideas/early-childhood-districts>

²⁴ https://buildinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/NutsandBolts2021_final1.pdf

childhood programs and services in their community. There are some examples of community-led initiatives focused on coordinating access to early childhood programs and services (e.g. Collective Impact home visiting grantees), but current efforts have not been scaled statewide.

Beginning in 2019, Missouri used funding from the Preschool Development Grant to implement regional collaborative networking sites in a few areas of the state. From 2020-2022, the state piloted an expanded approach to local coordination with designated leaders in many communities around the state and supported them to participate in a readiness phase to build community partnerships and enhance collaboration within their community.

To sustain the work resulting from this readiness phase, OOC plans to continue to support partnerships with a network of community leaders around the state. Community leaders will be OOC's local partner in each region of the state to increase awareness of, coordination of, and access to high-quality early childhood programs and services. To achieve these goals, community leaders will partner with existing community-based efforts focused on the local coordination of early childhood programs and services. OOC is committed to supporting community leaders as they take on this critical work, honoring their commitment to the children and families of Missouri.

Objectives, Strategies, and Action Items

Objective 1: Establish a statewide network of community leaders charged with a clearly defined set of roles and responsibilities. Building on the work from the pilot, establish a network of leaders statewide to serve as local partners for OOC.

Strategies:

- Develop clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and deliverables for community leaders
- Identify and, in areas without a community leader, recruit a community leader in every area of the state and resource them to complete their responsibilities
- Implement ongoing and individualized support to community leaders based on their needs and local context
- Develop common data points or indicators to measure the impact of community leaders

2023 Action Items:

- Define roles, responsibilities, and deliverables for community leaders
- Select community leaders for each region to ensure statewide coverage
- Create a technical assistance plan to ensure community leaders have the support they need to implement their responsibilities

Objective 2: Increase coordination of existing high-quality services in each part of the state through community leader infrastructure. Support community leaders to develop a local early childhood plan, in collaboration with local stakeholders, to increase awareness and coordination of existing early childhood programs with the ultimate goal of increased access to early childhood experiences that prepare children for school.

Strategies

- Support community leaders across the state to implement a local early childhood plan, aligned with the state vision, that meets the individual needs of the community
- Support community leaders to identify the barriers faced by families in their community and as they grow in capacity over time to work towards addressing those barriers

2023 Action Items:

- Provide training on a template for local early childhood plans and offer guidance for community leaders in completing their plans
 - At a minimum, community leaders should develop a plan that includes compiling and maintaining a list of local resources, coordinating information campaigns for all childhood programs, increasing coordination between programs, and identifying greatest barriers to access
- Share strategies and success stories amongst community leaders to promote collaboration

Big Goal 4: Modernize Systems and Improve Operations

Missouri will identify and implement critical shifts in OOC operations to improve the experience of families and early childhood professionals and to yield important data to inform policy and decision-making.

Background

Operations, systems, and processes are the backbone to a successful organization. Without strong operational practices, expanding access to services is often challenging. Families with young children in need of early childhood services are already facing many barriers to access, both personal and systemic. To minimize barriers where possible, OOC strives to modernize its systems and improve its operations, so that families are easily able to access the information and supports they need.

Current State

Due to outdated systems and the utilization of various platforms as a result of the consolidation of programs into one agency, OOC's systems are not currently serving families and professionals as well as they should. Despite the best efforts of staff, outdated systems result in lengthy, complex processes for families and professionals.

OOC is currently in the process of updating several of its existing systems, including its professional development system and Child Care Data System (CCDS). Additionally, OOC is developing an ECIDS, which will collect, store, maintain, and report aggregate early childhood information from nine of the state's early childhood programs.

As OOC seeks to improve these systems and processes, it is committed to prioritizing the experiences of families and providers to make sure the technological and operational improvements are aligned with the needs of the field. In addition to user experiences, OOC aims to hold a high standard of customer service and maintain two-way communication with families, providers, early childhood professionals, and other stakeholders.

Objectives, Strategies, and Action Items

Objective 1: Modernize and integrate data systems. Update data systems and processes to collect data efficiently and in an integrated manner, so that information across programs can be reported in near-real time and used to inform decision making.

Strategies

- Acquire and/or upgrade data systems used by all programs in OOC to ensure information is collected in an electronic format that can interact with other data systems and be easily analyzed
- Develop an ECIDS that unifies key early childhood data points collected by separate programs
- Use data from ECIDS to produce unduplicated child counts and answer fundamental questions about utilization to help inform decision making
- Report trends in data from ECIDS to stakeholders in a user-friendly dashboard that is in near-real time
- Update the CCDS to integrate provider account/case management, time and attendance tracking, claims, payments, and background checks into one system
- Update the professional development system to analyze up-to-date workforce data to identify recruitment and retention needs

2023 Action Items:

- Implement the use of an ECIDS
- Launch a new professional development system with key workforce data
- Award CCDS to an experienced vendor and launch the first phase of implementation

Objective 2: Improve operations for families, providers, and professionals to easily navigate information, forms, applications, and resources from OOC. Orient operations around a customer service mindset and utilize more effective processes to better meet the needs of families and providers.

Strategies:

- Analyze critical touch points with families and providers for each OOC program based on a journey mapping process
- Streamline the experience of families based on stakeholder feedback and insight from journey mappings:
 - Ensure all online resources are up to date and easily accessible for families
 - Identify opportunities to align eligibility requirements for various childhood programs
 - Improve application processes for families to access programs and services, including supports throughout the process and updates on application status
- Track key metrics to measure improvement in family and provider experience over time (e.g., processing time for applications, survey providers after their licensing review)
- Explore approaches to reduce barriers for childhood professionals:
 - Simplify completing credentials and logging required clock hours with a new professional development system
 - Streamline the licensing process for providers, while maintaining health and safety standards
 - Differentiate licensing monitoring by modifying the monitoring activities based on a program's compliance history
 - Expedite processing timelines for child care subsidy approval, child care licensing approval, and background checks by modernizing systems and streamlining internal processes

2023 Action Items:

- Analyze data based on key touch points based on journey mappings
- Identify measures and set targets to improve the satisfaction and experiences of families, providers, and professionals accessing OOC programs and services
- Begin tracking identified measures and progress towards targets

Conclusion

The unification of childhood programming into OOC has presented a unique opportunity for Missouri to enhance coordination within the childhood system to better serve children, families, and professionals. OOC is capitalizing upon this opportunity and, through this plan, is setting a clear vision for a strong, unified childhood system. As articulated herein, all programs and services are working toward this vision and aiming to expand access to high-quality childhood services across the state.

OOC and its partners are eager to build upon their work in the past year and move toward a future where all of Missouri's children are safe, healthy, and successful learners who are prepared for school.

Appendix I: Success Measures

OOC aims for its programs and services to meet the needs of Missouri's children and families, particularly those who are economically disadvantaged. These programs and services are striving towards the same vision and collaborating when appropriate.

To ensure that programs and services are on track to meet these ambitions, OOC has set the following measures to monitor progress. Fiscal Year 2026 (FY26) Targets were calculated based on what is feasible with current investment in each program, but additional investments are needed to achieve the FY26 Stretch.

Big Goal 1: Expand Access to High-Quality Programs and Services					
Measures	FY21 Data	FY22 Data	Percent Change	FY26 Target	FY26 Stretch
Increase the number of children participating in public preschool settings	40,553	41,291	1.8%	48,502	68,823
Increase the number of children receiving an annual developmental screening	68,601	73,300	6.5%	120,593	177,398
Increase the number of children participating in child care subsidy	21,774	29,226	25.5%	33,000	38,900
Increase the number of families accessing home visiting services aimed at improving health outcomes	1,036	1,056	1.9%	1,056*	2,158
Increase the number of families accessing home visiting services aimed at reducing child abuse and neglect	1,409	1,649	14.6%	1,649*	3,094
Increase the number of families accessing home visiting services aimed at providing parent education	34,793	36,064	3.6%	64,000	66,240
Increase the number of children with First Steps Individualized Family Service Plans	6,792	7,455	9.8%	8,427	9,000
Increase the number of children accessing Afterschool Programming	18,122	21,503	15.7%	23,000	29,282
Increase number of subsidy accepting child care providers	1,842	2,419	24.0%	2,860	3,301

Increase number of regulated child care providers	3,189	2,888	-9.5%	3,301	3,669
Increase regulated child care capacity	166,505	164,594	-1.3%	172,817	177,594

*Already serving the maximum capacity based on the current investment

Big Goal 2: Improve the Quality of Programs and Services				
Measures	FY21 Data	FY22 Data	FY26 Target	FY26 Stretch
Increase the number of programs participating in QAR	42	92	660	990
Increase the quality of QAR-participating programs	3.7 on 7-point scale*	4.2 on 7-point scale*	Emerging. After a framework for QAR is selected in 2023, then targets will be developed.	
Increase the number of home visiting programs participating in quality improvement	NA	NA	Emerging. After OOC creates and finalizes a framework for home visiting quality in 2024, then targets will be developed.	

*Data are based on results from the environmental rating scale (ITERS/ECERS) framework used in Cohorts 1-5. The scale may vary in future years depending on the quality framework selected by OOC.

Big Goal 3: Strengthen Community Leadership				
Measures	FY21 Data	FY22 Data	FY26 Target	FY26 Stretch
Increase the percentage of counties with identified community leaders	43%	75%	100%	NA
Increase the percent of community leaders that are implementing a local early childhood plan	NA	NA	100%	NA
Increase the percent of community stakeholders that indicate community leaders are increasing awareness for early childhood programs	NA	NA	Emerging. After community leaders begin to implement their local plans, then targets will be developed.	

Increase the percent of community stakeholders that indicate community leaders are increasing coordination for early childhood programs	NA	NA	
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Big Goal 4: Modernize Systems and Improve Operations

The measures and targets are to be determined. OOC is working on identifying and establishing the systems and improvements necessary to better serve families and professionals. As named in the action items for Big Goal 4, OOC plans to implement new systems in 2023. These systems must be in place before OOC can identify the measures needed to track the experiences of families, providers, and professionals. Once these systems and metrics are established, OOC will set measures and targets for Big Goal 4. In the interim, OOC will track its progress on this Big Goal through the completion of the 2023 action items.

Ultimate Goal: School Readiness

OOC measures its success across each of the OOC's Big Goals by tracking progress towards its ultimate goal of school readiness. To measure school readiness, Missouri LEAs use a Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA), which is a one-time assessment administered by kindergarten teachers and designed to measure a child's skills and behaviors within their first few weeks of kindergarten. LEAs have a choice between three tools that have been approved by OOC.

In 2021, OOC began to offer educators training and supports for KEA. There were 15 LEAs who participated in the first pilot year, 849 children were assessed using the Kindergarten Observation Form (KOF) approved tool and 58% of the children were determined to be ready for kindergarten. In 2022, the pilot expanded significantly with 212 LEAs using the KOF to assess over 22,700 children and 54% of the children were ready for kindergarten. With the use of a KEA now included in the Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP), OOC anticipates a continued rise in KEA participation.

Year	Number of Districts	Number of Teachers	Number of Students
21-22*	15	100	849
22-23*	212	1,200	22,700
23-24 (projected)	325	3,000	35,000
24-25 (projected)	410	4,500	50,000
2026 Target	490	6,650	66,000

*Data for 2021-22 and 2022-23 only include LEAs using the KOF tool. While other students were assessed using an approved KEA tool, the data are not yet available. Thus, the current KEA participation is likely greater than depicted in the chart.

Appendix II: Glossary

Access – The number of children or families participating in an early care and education service or program.

Diversity – Variation among individuals, as well as within and across groups of individuals, both alike and different in age, geography, race, ethnicity, gender, culture, socio-economic status and mental and physical ability.

Early care and education – Settings in which children are cared for and educated by people other than their parents or primary caregivers with whom they live (e.g., center-based care, preschool, family child care homes).

Early childhood – The developmental period spanning from birth to age five.

Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS) – A system that collects, integrates, maintains, stores, and reports information from early childhood programs serving families with young children across multiple agencies within a state.

Early childhood professional – Any person who works with, or on behalf of, young children with the goal of improving the safety, health, and learning as well as their overall quality of life.

Equity – Refers to the notion that individuals will receive the necessary resources they need to thrive, regardless of national origin, race, gender, sexual orientation, first language, ability, or other distinguishing characteristics. Equity is present when a child or family's race, ethnicity, income, ability, or other demographic features do not determine their opportunities or outcomes. Equity should not be confused with equality.

Evidence-based – Practice, regimen, or service that is grounded in evidence (empirical data, efficacy studies), can demonstrate that it improves outcomes and is effective in meeting goals; elements of evidence-based practice are standardized, replicable and effective within a given setting and for a group of participants.

Family engagement – An interactive process through which professionals and families, family members, and their children build positive and goal-oriented relationships. It is a shared responsibility of families and professionals that requires mutual respect for the roles and strengths each has to offer. Family engagement means doing with, not doing to or for, families.

Home visiting – A prenatal, infant and early childhood health and development approach in which the design assumes home visits with parents as the primary method for delivering a service or intervention, and through which an ongoing relationship is developed with enrolled families over time.

Mixed delivery – A mixed delivery system consists of a wide range of provider types and settings, including child care centers and home-based child care providers, Head Start and Early Head Start, state pre-kindergarten, and home visiting service providers across the public, private and faith-based sectors.

Regulated child care - This term includes both licensed providers and licensed-exempt providers, such as religious organizations and nursery schools.

Strategic plan – A plan that determines the vision and mission and activities an organization, agency or group is going to do over the next few years and how that is going to be accomplished.

Subsidy – The provision of financial assistance for child care services through the payment of full or partial child cost, based on a sliding fee scale, to enable families to obtain and retain employment or the skills necessary to obtain employment, with the ultimate goal being to break the cycle of poverty.

Vulnerable populations – Individuals who are economically disadvantaged, experiencing homelessness, experiencing trauma or mental health issues, in foster care, experiencing abuse or neglect, children with disabilities, or whose native language is other than English.

Workforce – The broad range of professionals engaged in the care and education of young children.

Appendix III: Early Childhood Workforce

OOC recognizes that recruiting, retaining, and supporting an effective early childhood workforce is critical for realizing Missouri's vision for early childhood. In fact, it will be impossible for Missouri to achieve its goals of expanding access to and improving the quality of early care, education, and services without a strong, well-supported, and well-compensated early childhood workforce. In Missouri, like most states, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the already-fragile early childhood workforce and made it more difficult for early childhood programs to recruit, retain, and support an effective early childhood workforce.

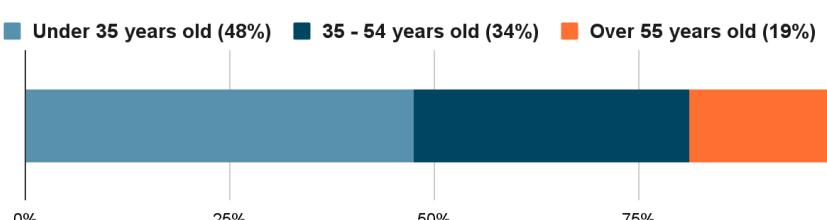
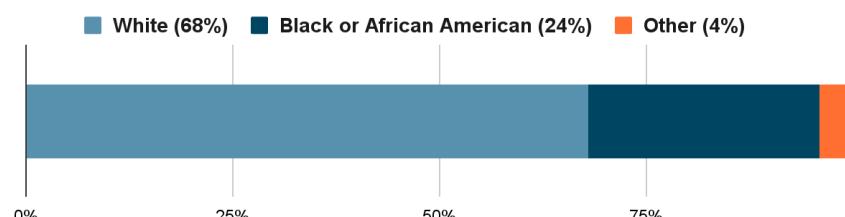
To better understand the challenges and needs of the workforce, OOC has partnered with a university to collect data on the early childhood workforce. The report has identified, unsurprisingly, that compensation is one of the greatest challenges for recruitment and retention of a qualified workforce in Missouri.

A significant wage gap exists across occupations, settings, and sectors, which highlights the lack of parity within the workforce. For example, workers in regulated child care programs, which comprise about 80% of the workforce, have a median annual wage of \$23,040, while kindergarten teachers and their colleagues with similar responsibilities earn \$48,430.

Approximately **45,000** professionals are part of Missouri's early childhood workforce.

95% of childhood professionals are women.

92% of childhood professionals work with groups of children.



This report also revealed key demographic information about the workforce. The majority of the workforce is composed of individuals who identify as White (68%) or Black/African American (24%). Almost half (48%) of the workforce is under 35 years old.

Understanding the current composition of the workforce will enable OOC to consider untapped populations as they seek to expand the childhood workforce.

OOC is committed to continuing to support and invest in the early childhood workforce and recognizes that these professionals are essential to expanding access to and improving the quality of childhood experiences.

In the short term, OOC plans to:

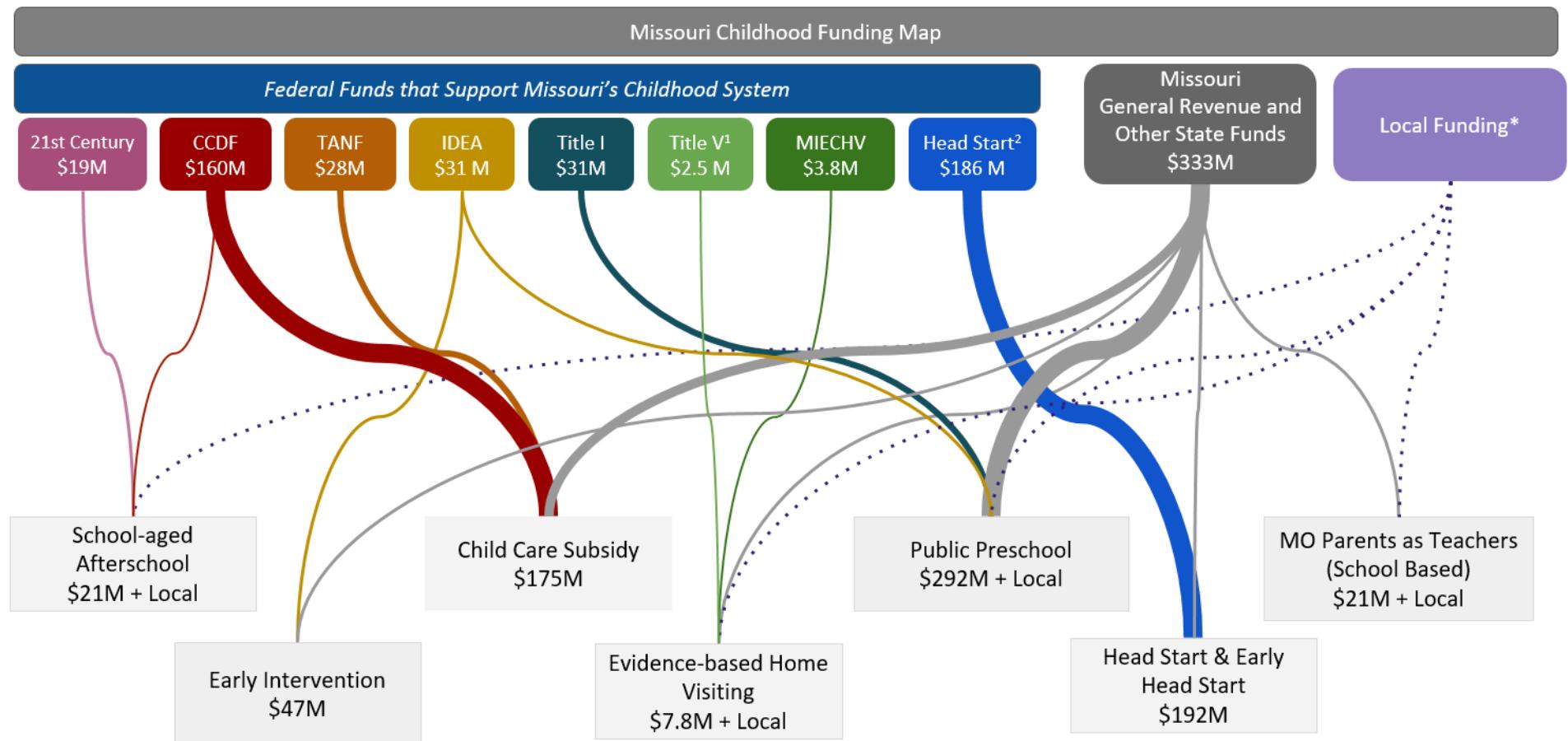
- Continue collecting and updating workforce data
- Offer scholarships and grants for professionals seeking additional credentials or education
- Offer retention grants to child care providers and home visitors
- Launch the new professional development system
- Compile and disseminate workforce best practices

In future years, OOC is also considering opportunities to:

- Collect data on workforce compensation, retention, and environments
- Align compensation with workforce pathways
- Offer an alternate pathway to professionals seeking additional credentials
- Adjust educator preparation programs to align with early childhood pathways

Appendix IV: Current Investments in Missouri's Childhood System

This graphic represents the FY23 funding for direct service programs in the state. Missouri's childhood system is funded through a combination of federal, state, and local dollars which are blended and braided to provide families access to high-quality programming. To meaningfully expand access to and improve the quality of the childhood system, it is important to understand and maximize current investments.



*Decisions for local investment are made at the district level, and funds are often blended or braided with other funding streams. It is challenging to know at the state level how much is being spent locally on early childhood services.

¹Title V is operated through the MO Department of Health and Social Services

²Head Start funds do not flow through OOC, but directly to grantees.

In addition to providing funding for direct services, some funding streams, and others not pictured here (e.g., Preschool Development Grant Birth to Five) also support the infrastructure necessary to operate a strong childhood system (e.g., staffing, quality improvement, local collaboration, data systems). As Missouri considers opportunities to further invest in the state's early childhood system, investments will be needed for both direct services to children and families as well as support for the infrastructure.

Appendix V: Stakeholder Engagement

The Office of Childhood is committed to ongoing engagement with stakeholders. Since the inception of OOC and the consolidation of nearly all publicly-funded childhood programs, OOC has worked to create meaningful, two-way stakeholder engagement processes to ensure the voices and experiences of stakeholders are represented in decision-making. OOC has identified the following priorities through a prior engagement with the Hunt Institute: 1) active communication and relationship building; 2) collaborative decision-making; 3) family voice, engagement, and leaders; 4) diversity, inclusion, and equity of engagement; 5) continuous and consistent communication of decisions and outcomes (i.e., “closing the loop”). These priorities are used to guide all ongoing and continuous stakeholder engagement.

Shortly after initiating the strategic planning process, the Early Childhood State Advisory Council (ECSAC) approved the existing Zero to Three Core Committee to serve as the Strategic Plan Work Group (see Table A).

- In collaboration with OOC through monthly meetings, the Strategic Plan Work Group provided feedback and iterated on the strategic plan’s Big Goals, objectives, strategies, and action items.
- The Strategic Plan Work Group represents a variety of backgrounds including child care and home visiting professionals and early childhood advocates.
- Updates to the strategic plan were also shared with the Early Childhood Advisory Council at the May and October 2022 meetings (Table B).
- OOC also sought input and feedback from the Zero to Three Steering Committee and the State Board of Education.

Upon completion of the strategic plan, OOC plans to engage groups of families, providers, and early childhood professionals, with a particular focus on historically marginalized groups, through listening sessions in partnership with the ECSAC, Parent Advisory Council, community leaders, and other community-based partner organizations. OOC will revise the strategic plan to reflect the resulting feedback and recommendations prior to the finalization of the document. OOC will leverage the community-based relationships that its partner entities hold to ensure the voices and perspectives of historically marginalized groups – especially families and providers – are included in the stakeholder engagement effort. OOC plans to review this plan annually in conjunction with the roles and responsibilities of the ECSAC.

Table A: Zero to Three Steering Committee

Deidre Anderson*, United Inner City Services/EarlyStart	Carolyn Chrisman, Economic Development
Robin Phillips*, Child Care Aware® of Missouri	Terri Foulkes, Missouri After School Network
Linda Rallo*, Aligned	Sister Anne Francioni, Whole Kids Outreach
Brenda Shields*, House of Representatives	Debbie George, Home-Based Provider
Craig Stevenson*, Kids Win Missouri	Sarah Gould, Community Support Services of Missouri
Pam Thomas, DESE Office of Childhood	Melissa Klocke, Early Childhood Learning Center
Emily van Schenkhof*, Children’s Trust Fund	Wilford Pinkney, St. Louis City Mayor’s Office
Pamela Speer, Missouri Accreditation of Programs for Family and Youth	Stacey Wright, Missouri Head Start State Collaboration Office

* Core Committee member and member of Strategic Plan Work Group

Table B: Early Childhood State Advisory Council

Ms. Teri L. Armistead, Missouri Department of Social Services	Ms. Melody A. Boling, Missouri Department of Mental Health
Mrs. Stacey Owsley Wright, State Director of Missouri Head Start	Dr. Kathy Fuger, University of Missouri Kansas City
Ms. Cheryl Kosmatka, Office of the Coordination of Education of Homeless Children and Youth	Ms. Pamela M. Clark, early care and education provider
Ms. Sara Walraven, First Steps provider	Ms. Clara Wilson, First Steps provider
Dr. Tracy Stroud, First Steps provider	Dr. Carlotta Kimble, First Steps provider
Ms. Amy Liston, Missouri Department of Commerce and Insurance	Dr. Pam Thomas, Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
Mrs. Lesley Ann Bickel, Parent Member	Ms. Sherri Bramhall, Parent Member

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